

On guard in Iraq



Photo by Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew Wimberly



Photo by Capt. Shawn Harper

Lt. Col. Christopher J. Putko, 1-4th ADA commander, presents the mayor of Airport Village with a Certificate of Friendship. Photo left: Medics of the 1st Armored Division's Division Artillery provide medical support.

Getting to know the neighbors

Wackernheim soldiers help Iraqi Airport Village get back on its feet

By Chief Warrant Officer 2
Andrew Wimberly and Capt.
Tom Noble
1-4th Air Defense Artillery

Robert Frost said good fences make good neighbors, but for residents of Airport Village, just east of Baghdad International Airport, matters are a little more complicated.

Since May Wackernheim's 1st Battalion, 4th Air Defense Artillery, has teamed up with a variety of Army units to spearhead Task Force Neighborhood, an attempt to increase mutual security and help the Iraqi population

begin to recover from the economic shambles left by the war.

Along with elements of the 1st Armored Division's Division Artillery and the 414th and 490th Civil Affairs Teams, 1-4th ADA soldiers have worked hard to establish sincere and mutually beneficial relations with the residents of Airport Village. Before the war the 3,775 villagers were employed as airport and palace workers under the Baathist regime.

Since relieving the 3rd Infantry Division, 1st AD has made the living environment for

villagers secure from looters and potential terrorist attacks. Soldiers from 1-4th ADA have been involved inspecting vehicles and people entering and exiting Airport Village to limit unauthorized access. They conduct mounted and dismounted patrols to ensure security and safeguard property.

The "By Daring Deeds" battalion soldiers have supported the repair of water lines to ensure a continuous water supply for residents. They continue to deal with issues such as electricity and trash collection, consulting with village officials and establishing methods to achieve agreed upon goals.

Thanks to 1st AD Engineers the necessary equipment and materials to repair infra-

structure directly related to the Airport Village and its work force have been made available. Coordination between 1-4th ADA and community leaders has helped Airport Village residents benefit from the reconstruction of the airport. The new economic activity has created new jobs and steady incomes, enabling Airport Village workers to earn a living for their families.

Jobs as interpreters and translators, and technical jobs in engineering and public works are bringing new life to this once middle-class neighborhood. Soldiers of the 1-4th ADA continue to do their part to create a safe working and living environment for the Iraqi people to build their future prosperity.



Clearing the barrel for safety's sake

Spc. Andrew Meissner, an Army journalist with the 1st Armored Division's Public Affairs Office in Iraq, clears his weapon before entering the Victory Palace grounds outside of Baghdad. Like the heat, dust and MREs, weapons safety is another fact of life for soldiers stationed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Photo by Karl Weisel

On guard in Iraq

Taking extremes of Iraqi duty in stride

141st Signal soldiers adapt to heat, long days and limited connections back home

By David Ruderman

104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Securing Baghdad in the wake of America's military victory in Iraq has exposed soldiers of Wiesbaden's 141st Signal Battalion to an array of extremes that no training or previous deployment could ever simulate.

"It's a little shocking to come over here and see how Saddam ran the country," said Spc. David Jones of Company A, 141st Signal. "He didn't give anything to the little people. He hogged everything for himself, built what he wanted. This country is torn to hell."

The single soldier from Manassas, Va., sat under camouflage netting atop a watchtower on the compound wall of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team's headquarters, the former al-Sijood Palace. Below him stretched as-Shaara al-Kindi, a major road paralleling the Tigris River and linking central Baghdad with its western suburbs and the international airport.

The road lay empty in the blinding morning light except for an occasional pair or trio of HMMWVs and trucks rolling into the compound's massive arched entry tower. Behind him on the former palace grounds two soldiers poured gasoline on half barrels of burning excrement collected from temporary latrines dug in the bone dry earth.

Mix of emergencies, boredom

"Everything's kind of sporadic down here," said Spc. Steven Dudgeon of Company A as the plumes of black smoke ascended into the cloudless sky. "You've got all kinds of s*** coming down, policies changing. Now we've got a water leak; that's kind of more important. I woke up this morning, there was water all over."

When 141st Signal moved onto the compound in mid-May the stench of rotting flesh permeated the air, said Spc. Justin Lafromboise as he poured more gasoline on the fire. "We were doing all kinds of police calls, cleaning out the area. I think it's getting better because we're getting used to it. Nothing bothers you after a while. Whoever said s*** burns was lying."

"We go on convoys every day," said Dudgeon. "We go to the airport and other places, not necessarily downtown. Everybody's looking at you hard, but I haven't seen anything. You hear about RPG attacks, but I haven't seen anything, not even a fight."

Back on the watchtower Pfc. Charles Mitchell and Spc. Jeremiah Rojas, both of Company A, made arrangements for the guard duty rotation. "We're on three hour shifts in the sun. We've also got another tower. Just the other day they said there were demonstrations going on and they put us on a high alert, but they didn't get this far," said Mitchell.

Keeping watch and trying to stay in the shade, they discussed the tenuous connections with their families back home and the familiar western world they left behind on the flight line at Rhein Main.

"I get a few letters, but if you're trying to make calls to the rear it's really hard," said Mitchell. "Sometimes you don't get through for a couple of days."

"They've got morale phones. Sometimes it takes two hours to get through," said Rojas, who tries to stay in touch with his wife Leslie and son Jeremy, 7, a first-grader at Hainerberg Elementary School.

"I get mail and talk to him every once in a while. He just basically asks what I'm doing out here, basically how he misses me and stuff. I don't tell him about all the stuff that's going on, people getting shot and stuff. I just do what I can to keep busy," he said.

The word from back home is that family members are hoping and praying their soldiers will be home soon.

"The FRG [Family Readiness Group] doesn't really know what's going on I guess," said Rojas. "There are a lot of rumors going around back there about when we're coming home. Our mission is 365 days, till complete. I'm thinking six to eight months max. Maybe before the end of the year, I really can't say."

After burning the land for 14 hours the sun set around 8 p.m., but the heat lingered till the middle of the night. Powerful electric searchlights burned incessantly on the former palace



Photo by David Ruderman

Spc. David Jones, Company A, 141st Signal Battalion, keeps the morning watch over Shaara al-Kindi Road.

tennis courts, where a small knot of curfew violators sat surrounded by concertina wire.

A crescent moon rose at 3 a.m. and a breeze from the north brought a mild, but discernible breath of freshness to the air. At 4:30 a.m. the voice of the muezzin drifted over the compound wall from a nearby mosque, calling the faithful to prayer in a chant that has reverberated for more than 12 centuries in the skies above Baghdad and along the Tigris.

"Allah..."

By dawn the curfew violators had been released. The crescent moon faded before the spreading light and intensifying heat of the morning sun. Temperatures began to rise and the soldiers rolled out of their mosquito nets to start their routines once again.



Photo by David Ruderman

Pfc. Charles Mitchell (left) and Spc. Jeremiah Rojas of Company A, 141st Signal Battalion, square away the guard rotation schedule for the alpha tower post facing the main road in front of 2nd Brigade Combat Team headquarters in Baghdad. Photo right: Spc. Justin Lafromboise of Company A pulls latrine detail.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Kontakt Club grills to enhance relations

Story and photos by
Cassandra Kardeke
221st Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office

The Dexheim military community came out in full force to embrace the start of the Dexheim Kontakt Club at a membership barbecue at Anderson Barracks.

Approximately 300 people, including Bundeswehr soldiers, enjoyed free food, music and learned more about the German-American friendship club.

"I think the turnout alone just proves what a great community this is," said Chris Romahn, one of the founding members of the Dexheim club.

Co-sponsored by the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program, 221st Base Support Battalion and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, the barbecue was planned to help introduce the club to the Dexheim military community.



Cpl. LaVincent Harris, interim international president of Kontakt Dexheim, discusses upcoming Kontakt activities while recruiting new members during a membership barbecue at the barbecue pavillion at Anderson Barracks June 28.

"Kontakt is all about enhancing German-American relations and getting to know more about our different cultures," said Torsten Huth, interim president and one of the founders of the Dexheim club.

But the first order of business in getting any club started is getting the word out and attracting members. Therefore, Huth and Romahn, both Germans with Kontakt Club experience, recruited the help of Spc. Robin Eckstein, BOSS president; Lisa Frankson, Dexheim events coordinator, and Cpl. LaVincent Harris of the Dexheim Health Clinic to spread the word and coordinate the membership drive.

"We wanted to start this off right and couldn't have done it without their help," said Huth. With many of the soldiers deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Huth said this was as good a time as any to start a Kontakt Club. "We want the families to know that we are here for them and can keep them busy getting to know about Germany and the local communities," he said.

"We have a lot of soldiers deployed and a lot of families left behind. So this is a good time to get the families involved, keep them active and at the same time help them make new friends in the local communities," said Frankson. Hans-Jochen Gerlach, Dexheim city mayor, agreed.

"There has always been a good relationship between the U.S. personnel stationed here and the people in the local communities. The Kontakt Club is just another



After signing up for the Kontakt Club, Command Sgt. Maj. Perry Clark, 123rd Main Support Battalion, pitches in to help grill and serve hamburgers and bratwursts during a Kontakt Club membership drive and barbecue at Anderson Barracks in Dexheim. The new Kontakt Club meets the first and third Wednesday of the month at the Single Soldier Lounge at 6:30 p.m.

way to enhance these good relations," he said during a live broadcast of the event on the American Forces Network's Z-98.

And now that the club has officially started, lots of activities and events are being planned, to include regular meetings held at the Single Soldier Lounge behind the Military Police substation on Anderson Barracks. Called Stammtisch, the meetings will be held the first and third Wednesday of the month at 6:30 p.m.

"Thanks to the BOSS program, we've been allowed to utilize their clubhouse as a base point for soldiers and families to find out more about the Kontakt Club," said Huth. It will also serve as a gathering point for upcoming trips and outings on the town to include a medi-

eval style dinner that is being planned.

"Not very far from here is a really neat medieval style restaurant that is great for the entire family with traditional style food and of course – no silverware. We'll be eating with our fingers," said Romahn.

Other upcoming activities include taking advantage of the summer months to include a sailing trip in Holland, amusement park trips and skiing. Skiing?

"No one thinks of skiing in the summer, but that's exactly what we're going to do. Right here in Germany only two and a half hours away. We're going to take a group skiing in the middle of summer," said Romahn during an interview on the Team 221st Hour on Z-98.

As Dexheim is located in the middle of wine country, a plan is also underway to have vineyard tours. "It's ideal for our location and at the same time we get to meet and interact with the farmers who are right outside our fence," said Harris who is also the interim international president of the club. As the club continues to grow, more events and activities will be planned along the way.

Kontakt clubs were created in a joint effort by the U.S. Army Europe and the Federal Ministry of Youth, Family, Women and Health in the early 1970s to introduce U.S. personnel and their families to their host country. Although many clubs closed down as a result of base closures during the U.S. draw-down, a few of the clubs still thrive today where military personnel are no longer stationed. Kontakt clubs are located throughout USAREUR. Call your local Public Affairs Office for information on a club near you.

221st BSB – Wiesbaden, Wackernheim, Dexheim

Community news notes

Town Hall

The 221st Base Support Battalion hosts a community Town Hall at the General H.H. Arnold High School auditorium at 5:30 p.m. July 16. All residents are encouraged to attend.

Dexheim bowling specials

The Dexheim Bowling Center offers daily specials. Bowl between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. for only 50 cents a game or \$1 a game from 2-5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Disco night is every Friday from 7-11 p.m. and Red Pin bowling is Saturdays from 7-11 p.m.

123rd MSB Run

The annual 123rd Main Support Battalion Run/Walk will be held at 10 a.m. July 19 at Anderson Barracks. Registration is from 8-9:30 a.m. Entry fee is \$15.

ACS celebration

Join Army Community Service during their free birthday celebration July 31 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Wiesbaden ACS, Building 7790 in Hainerberg Housing. Enjoy plenty of games for the entire family, giveaways and food.

Religious services

Wiesbaden Army Airfield Chapel holds Protestant services at 10 a.m., Gospel services at 12:45 p.m. and Catholic services at 5 p.m. Sunday. Hainerberg Chapel fea-

tures Catholic services at 9 a.m. and Protestant services at 11 a.m. Sunday. For more information call mil 337-1570 or civ (0611) 705-1570.

Sponsorship training

The Army Community Service Relocation Readiness Program offers unit sponsorship training. The next class is July 9 from 2-4 p.m. at ACS. Units wishing to schedule a different day can call the relocation manager at mil 337-5034 or civ (0611) 705-5034 for assistance.

Hearts Apart

The Dexheim Army Community Service offers a "Hearts Apart" support group for spouses of deployed soldiers every Tuesday at 10 a.m. Free child care is provided if reserved in advance. Call mil 334-5716 or civ (06133) 69-716 for more information.

FRG training

Army Community Service hosts a Family Readiness Group networking session July 23 from 10-11 a.m. and an FRG Basic Leader Training July 25 from 10 a.m. to noon. To sign up call mil 337-5754 or civ (0611) 705-5754.

Summer reading program

Team 221st community libraries host a Kids Only Club beginning July 9. Registration is continuous throughout the program. Weekly events are held every Wednesday

and may include a short camp-out or picnic accompanied by story time with the library staff. Stop by any of the community libraries at Wiesbaden, Dexheim or McCully Barracks to find out more.

Golf scrambles

Friday night scrambles are back at Rheinblick Golf Course. The next scrambles will be held July 11 and 25

at 6 p.m. Experienced players will be paired with inexperienced players.

Protestant Women of the Chapel

Protestant Women of the Chapel hold a Dog Days of Summer Potluck Brunch Aug. 7 and Chapel in the Park Aug. 14 at the Hainerberg Chapel from 10-11:30

a.m. Reserve child care through Aug. 7. Call mil 337-1570.

Monthly barbecue

Wiesbaden Youth Services offers a barbecue the first Friday of the month for all registered members after school. This is a great opportunity for new youth in the community to get to know other children and what activities are available through YS.

District officials sponsor trips for families

By Ignacio "Iggy" Rubalcava

222nd Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office

Since the soldiers of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team and Division Artillery departed for Baghdad, the Baumholder military community has seen an incredible outpouring of support from the German community for family members left behind as well as the deployed soldiers.

The district of Baumholder has volunteered to sponsor several trips for family members in the coming months, and the first of these trips left for the Pyramid Indoor Pool, Spa and Resort in Hambachtal June 27. About 50 family members boarded a bus from the Hall of Champions for a day of swimming and other recreational activities at the spa north of Idar-Oberstein. Baumholder District Mayor Volkmar Pees, who spearheaded the arrangements, was on hand to wish them a nice time.

At the resort, the city sponsored a day ticket for each member which allowed them admission to the pool where a restaurant, slides, whirlpool and other activities were at the disposal of the family members.

The next tour is planned for the first week in August when the city will sponsor a trip to the dinosaur display at the Kamgarn in Kaiserslautern. Details are now being coordinated and will be published when available.

Baumholder is not the only community stepping forward to support the family members. The German Artillery School in Idar-



Photo by Ignacio "Iggy" Rubalcava

Bridget Sanders helps a passenger on her way to fun at Hambachtal while Volkmar Pees, Baumholder district mayor, watches the family members board the bus that the district administration chartered for the family members. Pees' office also funded the admission of family members to the exclusive spa and resort.

Oberstein is planning to host a family day when they will take the adults to Trier for a sightseeing and shopping excursion while the children will be entertained at the Artillery School. Details will be published as

they are available.

For the soldiers downrange, local German merchants have banded together and are providing single soldiers with "care" packages consisting of the bare necessities such

as toothpaste, toilet paper, snacks, deodorant, etc.

Since there are numerous units downrange, one or two units will be targeted monthly to receive the "care" packages.

These offers are open to all military family members of deployed soldiers and more details are available at Army Community Service. Call mil 485- 7135 or contact your family readiness group.

Veterinary services

The Baumholder Veterinary Clinic offers animal care to all the communities of the 222nd Base Support Battalion. They are a full service clinic providing veterinary care and surgeries for small animals. All patients are seen by appointment only. The clinic is located at Hospital Kaserne in Building 8758 (behind the Health Clinic). They are open Mondays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. (closed from noon to 1 p.m. for lunch), Tuesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (closed from noon to 1 p.m. for lunch). The clinic is closed on all U.S. holidays, USAREUR training holidays and the last day of the month. For more information call the veterinary clinic at mil 485-6636 or civ (06783) 6-6636.

New Tricare site

Wisconsin Physician Services, Tricare Europe's claim processor, recently deployed a new website to help beneficiaries obtain important information about the Tricare program.

Post notes

In addition to providing general information, the site offers beneficiaries the ability to review the status of claims and obtain duplicate explanations of benefits. Beneficiaries may also update their address and primary health insurance information.

Providers may also register online to obtain eligibility and catastrophic cap information. They may also check the status of claims and obtain duplicate Tricare EOBs. Visit www.tricare4u.com for more information.

Relocation for spouses

If your spouse is currently deployed but has received orders to relocate, don't delay planning and organizing your move. You can take care of many move-related tasks before your spouse returns to Baumholder. The more you get done now, the less stressful your move will be. As an added bonus, the more quality time your family gets to spend

together when the soldier returns from the deployment.

The Baumholder ACS invites all spouses to schedule individualized relocation planning consultations. Whether the service member is currently deployed or in Baumholder, spouses can obtain the same quality assistance as the service member. ACS will provide a comprehensive packet about your new location, as well as information to help you organize a smooth move. Relocation assistance is available whether the move is a PCS move or the service member is retiring or separating from the Army.

Call Army Community Services at mil 485-8188 or civ (06783) 6-8188 for information and to schedule an appointment.

Chicken pox outbreak

A recent outbreak of chicken pox in Baumholder has made the medical commu-

nity aware that family members may need more information about the disease. Chicken pox is a viral disease spread through the air or by direct contact with skin lesions. Infected persons are contagious for several days before the rash appears and remain contagious until all lesions are crusted over. There is sometimes a fever, with fatigue and headache, for one to three days before the rash appears. This disease is mainly a danger to the unborn children of pregnant women, and requires isolation from other people until all lesions are crusted over and there is no fever present. There is a vaccine for chicken pox, called the "Varivax," which prevents the disease 90 percent of the time. Those who do get the disease after the vaccine have a much milder case. Help stop the spread of chicken pox in the community by immunizing, washing your hands frequently and keeping yourself or your child home when sick. If you come to the clinic for treatment, tell the staff you suspect chicken pox when you book the appointment, so that the child can be isolated from other patients.

Rodeo teaches youths rules of the road

By Ignacio "Iggy" Rubalcava

222nd Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office.

Summer is here, school is out and the weather has improved. Children have more opportunities for outdoor activities. One of the activities of choice for children is going for a bike ride. The Army and Air Force Exchange Service and the local Boy Scouts organized a bike rodeo to help children become more aware of safety and proper biking rules on post.

AAFES provided three bicycles from their toy store so that children who showed up without a bicycle could take turns navigating the course.

Also helping out was Capt. Chad Beasinger, Baumholder's Provost Marshal and an avid biker. Beasinger assisted the children with brake and gear cable adjustment. He also tightened handlebars, checked tire air pressure and provided general safety tips to the children who attended.

Mark Wojcik, scoutmaster for

Boy Scout troop 96, had one important piece of advice for all the children who showed up to navigate through the course, "No 'brain bucket,' no riding," he told all the riders ranging from 3 years old to mid teens. Not only was he passing on sound advice, but he was also alluding to a requirement for all bicycle riders to wear a helmet while riding on a military installation.

"It's the law," he said. "Plus it makes good sense and it's better to be safe than sorry."



Boy Scouts run beside a younger bike rodeo participant.



Photos by Ignacio "Iggy" Rubalcava

Capt. Chad Beasinger, 222nd Base Support Battalion provost marshal, checks the front forks and brakes on a bicycle for a bike rodeo participant.

Messages to Southwest Asia

Children ready letters for deployed parents

By Ignacio "Iggy" Rubalcava

222nd Base Support Battalion
Public Affairs Office

Baumholder's younger residents got an opportunity recently to send a little bit of home to their deployed parents by coming together to write letters and draw pictures to send downrange.

Organized by Bridget Sanders and Doris Price from Army Community Service, children ages 3-7 filed into the Wetzel Family Readiness Group building June 20 and sat down to draw pictures and write letters to be sent downrange.

To help feed their creativity, the children were treated to cookies and refreshments while they sat down and created their masterpieces for their parents. Some, too young to write or draw, contented themselves by seeing how many cookies they could stuff in their mouths at one time while the laughter of others echoed in the building as they scurried around playing with the toys scattered around the room. There was the occasional spilling of drinks as the children reached for crayons and tipped over cups of punch in the process but the Army Community Service vol-



Matthew and Ariana Lammers put the finishing touches on their art work that will be sent downrange to their deployed parent.



Photos by Ignacio "Iggy" Rubalcava

John Burnett and Emilee Conley work on their art projects during the recent creativity period for children in which they wrote letters or created art projects to send to their deployed parents.

unteers and employees took it all in stride. Napkins and mops suddenly appeared on the scene. The spills were contained and the drawing continued.

The children's letters, containing more graphics than text, will be given to the parents so they can send them on their way downrange.

"We have the envelopes on hand so all the parents have to do is address them, MPS them and

they're gone. And we've had some interesting letters today, a lot of glitter, stickers and things the kids like to use," said Sanders.

"Doris Price, the family advocacy assistant, and I sat down and started doing some brainstorming on some things we could do for kids to help them deal with the deployment and we came up with this," she said.

"It's a fun activity and we're

doing it to get the people out of the house. It's also good therapy for the children," said Price.

The information was put out to the families through family readiness group leaders, rear detachment commanders and family readiness liaisons.

"We hope to get about 32 children in here today. If participation is good we may repeat this again in the next few weeks," said Sanders."

On guard in Iraq



Photo by David Ruderman

1st Sgt. Kenneth Godfrey watches television with fellow 2nd Brigade Reconnaissance Team soldiers in their rewired entertainment center. Photo right: 2nd BCT trucks and HMMWVs are parked in the shade of date palms in the court of Kasr Al-Sijood, Saddam Hussein's former palace on the Tigris.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Settling in to ruins of al-Sijood Palace

2nd BCT works out of former Saddam palace on banks of Tigris River

By David Ruderman
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

As presidential palaces go Kasr al-Sijood hasn't got much in the way of amenities anymore.

Its four-story facade is marred by missile and bomb blasts, interior walls hang precariously over explosives-pocked marble stairways and its acres of gardens, once lush with water pumped from the nearby Tigris River, have withered to a dull thirsty tan.

"This place was just a disaster area," said Capt. Jonah Mazzacane, incoming signal officer for Baumholder's 2nd Brigade Combat Team that has occupied the former presidential palace since the middle of May. "There was rubble all over."

"You guys should have smelled

it. It was like dead meat," said Spc. Steven Dudgeon, Company A, 141st Signal Battalion. "There was all kinds of rubble down there; you couldn't really tell what it was."

"They pulled 1,400 bodies out of there," said Chaplain (Maj.) Ken Sorenson of the 2nd Brigade Ministry Team.

Al-Sijood, also known as the New Presidential Palace, was the heart of the Baathist regime, housing the prime minister's staff, the cabinet and a Republican Guard camp. It also served as a pleasure retreat for guests.

Al-Sijood made headlines last December as the first of eight sites investigated by UN weapons inspectors in the test of wills with the Saddam government that preceded the outbreak of war. Its fall to the Army's 3rd



Photo by David Ruderman

Capt. Jonah Mazzacane, 2nd BCT signal officer, strums a guitar in his second floor billet. "I haven't played much in the last six months," he said.

Infantry Division April 7, while Iraqi Information Minister Muhammad Said as-Sahhaf continued to claim that no American forces were in Baghdad, marked the beginning of the end of the military campaign.

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team has called al-Sijood Palace home since about May 15, said Capt. Keri Maloney, 2nd Brigade public affairs officer. The palace is the command and control headquarters for approximately 4,000 soldiers.

"We're covering two districts, Karkh and Karadah, with a population of about 800,000 people," said Maloney. "In general we've got a brigade of soldiers doing the right thing. We're making a difference,

doing the best we can to provide security and help neighborhood advisory councils get off the ground."

While the difficult and dangerous mission of ruling Baghdad continued, soldiers did what they could to make the ruins with a river view as comfortable as possible.

In a smaller complex directly west of the main palace Iraqi electricians Faaz Abu Ahmed and Abu Rina Raid rewired the 2nd Brigade Reconnaissance Team's entertainment center to run appliances off a

new 3,000-watt generator. "Now we're a little closer to our time, the 21st century," said 1st Sgt. Kenneth Godfrey, as he watched a large screen television with a dozen of his soldiers.

The building was used for throwing lavish parties under the former regime, said Abu Ahmed.

Sorenson described some of the atrocities reportedly committed in the palace by Saddam Hussein's son, Uday, among them inviting guests and then having them filmed as they were mowed down by gunfire. He reportedly kept two lions for the sport of terrorizing and murdering Iraqis who ran afoul of the regime or his personal whim.

"The Iraqis have told us over and over again how grateful they are for the American presence," said Sorenson.

Another aspect of being stationed among the modern day ruins of the Mesopotamian plains was a deeper feeling for the past, said

**"They pulled 1,400 bodies out of there."
— Chaplain (Maj.) Ken Sorenson**

Sorenson, who expressed a fascination with ancient Assyria that dated back to his days in

elementary school.

"Being here is like the whole history of the Holy Land because Abraham started here in the Ur of the Chaldees. It's one of those

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On guard in Iraq

40th Engineers spearhead rebuilding

Lay foundations for prosperity, peace with wide range of projects

By Karl Weisel

104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

While coalition forces continue to bear arms in an effort to quell terrorism and crime in Iraq, Army engineers are working hard to improve living conditions for Baghdad citizens.

Restoring water and electricity, sewage, repairing schools and even completing the Baghdad Zoo are all public works efforts being tackled by the 2nd Brigade's 40th Engineer Battalion.

"Whatever you do for the Iraqi people they appreciate it," said battalion Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Miller.

"We make contacts with the people in the area. We've been working with the sewer system for months," Miller said. "They (the Iraqi people who live in the sector) take us to the pumps that have broken and then we coordinate to get things fixed. We're getting a lot of support from the Iraqi population."

"One of the ways we do it is by way of interpreters," said Capt. Brendan Bowman, assistant brigade engineer. "Some of the interpreters live in the neighborhood and they can tell us where help is needed. We've just really gotten started completing some of the projects, and we're getting to where we can assess how the communities relate to it."

"Primarily our focus is public works restoration with an emphasis on sewage," Bowman said. "That's the first thing where we can really make an impact. We've only hit one batch of schools so far — three schools in



Photo by Karl Weisel

Command Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Miller (left) and Master Sgt. Jerry Bailey review a map of ongoing 40th Engineer Battalion projects in the central sector of Baghdad.

close proximity. We got support from corps-level engineers. That's part of Task Force Neighborhood. We've kind of put those projects on hold right now with combat operations going on as part of Operations Desert Scorpion and Sidewinder."

School projects have included electrical repairs, installing playgrounds and water fountains, and other renovations.

"We've also put in soccer fields. That means clearing unexploded ordinance and other debris," he said. "We go out to trouble sites, identify what's wrong with them and then try to fix them. At one power station looters had pulled out the wires and other equipment. We hire contractors to install

new equipment. We buy the parts for them and their guys put them in. Right now we're working an issue with fixing water main breaks to get the water going again."

Frustration city

He described how it can be frustrating sometimes when they repair something and then Iraqi looters turn around and steal the parts as soon as a project is completed. "It sucks — they steal stuff after a project, but we're making a difference."

Getting the Facility Protection Service — a locally hired civilian security force hired by the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority — to perform security instead of U.S. soldiers will free up soldiers for other mis-

sions, he said. "We're bringing up the FPS, training Iraqi guys and issuing them weapons — putting them on the ground."

Finishing construction on the Baghdad Zoo is seen as another project aimed at demonstrating to Baghdad citizens that the coalition forces are indeed intent on improving the quality of life for everyone. "It's a big project — first the zoo, then the park and the local area," said Bowman. "I think when the soldiers see that, when we open the zoo or the park, the public will realize we're making a difference. When the zoo opens after work is finished in mid-July it'll open to the public and have limited hours — limited to daylight hours at first until we fine-tune our security measures," he said.

Bowman said the public at large was never able to enter the park — it was solely open to Saddam's Baath Party members, so having the opportunity now should be a treat.

"We're doing most of the work. They've hired Iraqi personnel to do the cleaning," said Miller.

"The animals are in better shape than they were in," said Master Sgt. Jerry Bailey, 40th Engineer Battalion S-3 noncommissioned officer in charge. "We plan to finish the zoo project by July 15. We'll open at least parts of the zoo to the public and continue to work on the park. We're removing dirt and debris and cleaning the lake."

The 40th is getting support from the 94th Engineer Company, 130th Engineer Brigade and 203rd Engineer Company from Springfield, Mo., said Bailey.

"We've got 14 open projects in the Municipality of Karadah. The park project isn't as bad — five or six separate projects. In everybody's mind we're thinking we're getting closer to getting out of here. We're still making progress." (David Ruderman contributed to this story)

Settling in to ruins

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things. It gives it a human face, real living color."

Nineveh, the city from which Jonah tried to flee when called by God, is the site of present day Mosul, he said. "The Book of Esther takes place somewhere in ancient Persia and the prophet Ezekiel is buried near Babylon. The prophet Ezra is buried somewhere in the country as well. I'm sure it's right around here," he said.

"Imagine being a Christian in Iraq — that be me. We've met Syrian Orthodox guys. It was a great experience. They're really warm, friendly believers, really friendly to sit with and share faith with."

Still dealing with the lack of creature comforts remains a primary concern for many soldiers. Unlike many other units in and around Baghdad, 2nd BCT soldiers get a hot meal, either breakfast or lunch, every day. Spc. Christian Hinman,

Sgt. Ivan Goff and Spc. Dreama Lewis of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2nd Brigade, sat with Sgt. Shellyann Brown of HHC, 1st Armored Division, making small talk after dinner on the verandah of the palace.

The soldiers couldn't agree on exactly when they arrived at al-Sijood, an indication of settling into their routines in an unfamiliar setting.

"May 7," said Brown.

"Around the 13th," said Lewis.

"I can't remember," said Hinman.

"I thought it was going to be like Kuwait, living in sand and in tents," said Goff.

"It's much better," said Brown. "Except for the PortaPotties. Send in the PortaPotties."

"The major stuff at the beginning was mail that was not coming," said Sgt. Jesse Hazelet, noncommissioned officer in charge of the 2nd Brigade Ministry Team. "If you can call home to Mom you're really blessed."

"We take so much for granted," said Hazelet. "If we look back even at Vietnam or the first Gulf War, I'm talking about conditions for guys on the front line, it's a lot better. We're so spoiled and we don't even know it."

"Our biggest issue in morale for the soldiers is getting Internet and email so they can send a letter to mom," said Mazzacane, the signal officer. The problem is coming up with the funding. The chain of command understands the issue and large American corporations have had specialists on the ground to assess the situation. "It could take another three months," he said.

From his second floor room on the south side of the palace Mazzacane looked out over an artificial lake that draws its water from the Tigris. Under the Baathists, guests of the regime went sailing there on pleasure boats docked beyond the southern wall of the compound.

A month and a half into their new digs 2nd BCT soldiers were making the best of their unusual accommodations, but some funda-

mentals remained the same. "The hardest part is missing my family," said 2nd Lt. Chad Milligan of HHC, 2-6th Infantry.



Photo by Karl Weisel

Interpreter Zainab Mohammed Mohyialdeen explains pertinent Arabic terms to Capt. John T. Miller, Detachment A, 8th Finance Battalion, commander in the lobby of Kasr al-Sijood.